

HUSH-HUSH STUFF

Some Garbage Is Untouchable

Sometimes, trash comes to Washington's O Street Incinerator in portfolios and briefcases.

Call it America's super-secret disposal. It cuts down slightly on solid wastes; it adds slightly to air pollution.

Ever since World War II one of the burners at the 1st and O Street SE Incinerator has been reserved pretty much for hush-hush stuff—at least the stuff that isn't filed somewhere.

It's one of the public services Washington provides in a city that's full of agencies with secrets.

Almost everyday, limousines, private cars or government trucks drive up—sometimes with armed guards—and deliver trash. It comes by portfolio and briefcases, in paper bags, even cardboard cartons.

The delivery man, often dressed in a business suit, "checks in," then sits by the fire to make sure the trash burns.

The fire-watching can last anywhere from a half-hour to most of the day.

The incinerator's biggest customer now is the State Department, Foreman Charles Brown says.

But customers also include military agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, at times, the Central Intelligence Agency, although the latter has its own "self-destruct" unit.

Besides the government sources, the trash burner is also used at times by lawyers and private firms, most of them dealing in research.

"I guess they don't want the other fellow to know what they're doing," Brown surmises.

At one time, embassies used to make use of the hush-hush burner, but now they use it rarely—and then it's only by the British.

Some countries, of course, want to make sure their garbage doesn't fall into enemy hands. The Russian Embassy, for example, is believed to have its own incinerator at the embassy. But this is hard to confirm; the Russians don't want to talk about what they do with their trash.

Brown says that the Washington secret trash load has gone down considerably since the great war, although he doesn't keep a tonnage count.

People sometimes have to stand in line now, but not too long, he says.

But in World War II days, the line often went around the block.

Once during the war, Brown recalls, the Washington city government got a complaint that sugar, then being rationed, was being burned.

What caused the rumpus, he says, is that the old OSS used to deliver its secrets for burning in sugar sacks.

